

EDWARD MCCRORE

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## Poet Arrested on Pier

The next day's headline, you guess, or worse,  
    *Sandburg Clapped in Jail.* And beneath it,  
    *Spy or Traitor?* Depends which  
rag in Manhattan writes you up, bags  
and boxes off the SS Bergenford  
from Stockholm. 'Lenin's neighborhood,' a cop  
mutters among the official ganglia led  
by Captain John Trevor saying, 'You  
    broke our Trading with the Enemy  
    Act.' 'We're at peace,' you tell him,  
    'Moscow's not the enemy.'

You can't believe it's a clear blue Christmas Day  
in nineteen-eighteen, the armistice signed. Your wife  
    waits in Chicago, a one-month  
    daughter. You have inanely  
    thrilled at the wharves, American  
    flags after a three-months' absence.  
You sent yourself abroad to see if Russians  
    broke from the czar's rule  
gladly as Americans broke from George the Third.

You did your best, like Wilson, to take and bring  
back truth, Chicago pages waiting, a spread  
of newborn freedom, fairness, you hoped. Now  
Sweden grays behind you,  
song of rock and bird soaring in far north  
wind. Utterly silent.

Your friends, a little regiment, attack  
big desks. Sam Hughes, your editor,  
tries to outmaneuver War  
Secretary Newton Baker  
in peacetime withal. Clarence Darrow, famed  
Scopes defender, names you Warrior  
Poet: you hold a US Army  
Honorable Discharge. Casual  
New York hours of questioning  
dwindle down to the bit parts.  
Your room's dull beige, hard to imagine much.  
Bolshevik smell on you?  
Think American, ask for a Coke or Camel.

Three men still are quip and question. You figure  
one is a hard gin in the cocktail. One's  
a green twist and the other?—an olive plunk.  
'Why did the Russians send you back?' 'You miss  
all of your Red friends?'  
'Stockholm reeks with the worst spies.'  
'What's this book on your person?'  
'Comrade Lenin's black and scarlet  
hail *To American Workers!*'  
You should have left the thing in Europe. More  
bolts of Communist lightning  
help you little: out-West striking  
railroad workers, classless thunder,  
precincts expect, march of rebellion.  
You know poor pay's the cause, not Marx. The sky's  
not only red, it waves a blue and white  
where parents fear the spread of godless zeal.

You are released in a month. You carry home  
no letters, pictures and notes from Sweden. They'll  
be scrutinized for weeks. You have a poem  
in your head only, praising dutiful  
policemen. They are workers too, like pole  
and fence in a stockyard. Are they herder, hog or  
butcher? Something of all three.  
From cold January city to colder, you take  
the train to Chicago. Hug your wife and child!  
In bed awake, you feel the year is just  
beginning.

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**EDWARD MCCRORIE'S** translation of Homer's *Iliad* will appear this fall from the Johns Hopkins University Press. He has published four books of poetry, verse translations of *The Aeneid* and *The Odyssey*, and presently works on *Wilson's Day*, a long poem about Woodrow Wilson and key figures of his time.